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ABSTRACT

Roland Barthes points out in his pedagogical essays that, although students have been filled with horror stories of professorial expectations, at the same time they have expectations of their own. Barthes' points should be considered as a way of examining the classroom space and common writing teaching practices and opening them up to different and differing possibilities. Students arrive in the classroom expecting to be taught "something." Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's how-to manual, "Anti-Oedipus," reverberates with Barthes' descriptions of repressive teacher-student relations and the classroom situation. The roots of fascism lie, for Deleuze and Guatteri, in philosophies and systems of thought at the base of all systems of meaning: the subject, the agent, the one who wills. The two French thinkers seek plurality, multiplicity, a collective sort of subjectivity. Such a non-agent, an anti-oedipus, would be free to follow the force of its desires, desires that are the machine that drives the universe. Barthes recognizes the "territory" that he has to work with as "institutional space." There is also a "transferential" space, which is traditionally the relation between the director of the seminar and the student, but he refuses to be bound by this relation. The seminar, and also the composition classroom, is the space where this relation may find an opening in which to grow, to become. Freshman composition teachers, as instigators or facilitators, are operating deep within an established system. Decomposing the composition classroom is a perpetual process. (NKA)

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Roland Barthes and Decomposing/Deterritorializing the Writing Classroom

Students are disoriented when they enter the new territory of the college writing classroom. Most have been filled with horror stories of professorial expectations, yet at the same time, the students have expectations of their own, as Roland Barthes points out so clearly in his essays about pedagogy. As an instructor I, too, find myself at a loss sometimes in considering what to do with the classroom space now that I recognize the violence implicit within it. Barthes addressed these conflicts often as he considered his own seminars, and I believe that much of what he has to say can be of interest to those teaching undergraduates. Indeed, Barthes's points need very much to be considered as a way of examining the classroom space and common writing teaching practices and opening them up to different and differing possibilities. On the way, I want to refer to the way two other French thinkers, Deleuze and Guattari, approach the problem of "dire mastery" for their insight into this problem and how they reveal a way beyond it into perpetually new territories.

The problem with reconsidering teaching practices is the idea of teaching in the first place. Students arrive in the classroom expecting to be taught *something* -- knowledge, techniques. Teachers assume that students will cooperate in the "learning" process and appreciate the expertise and care that the teacher shares. But for Barthes, such activity is teaching as repetition, as passing on from master to pupil, perpetuating a

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paradigm of a "relation of superiority" that marks a pedagogical and social structure that limits ("Seminar" 339). The student relies on the teacher to provide the keys to economic success while the teacher in turn uses the students to maintain his or her post so as to ensure further opportunities to research, and, not inidentally, reach economic success.

Can we escape this cycle? To a certain extent, Barthes says no. "Law resists, mastery continues to weigh upon me, difference risks being perceived by fits and starts as vaguely repressive," he realizes. "Each time I want to hand the seminar over to the others, it comes back to me: I cannot evade a kind of 'presidence,' under whose gaze speech is blocked, hampered, embarrassed" ("Seminar" 339). The students' will-to-knowledge is consuming, even in the face of one who wishes to escape teaching as will-to-identity. Despite the best of intentions, the way out of repressive teaching practices is often blocked. One cannot simply escape from traditional pedagogical institutions based on desire alone. But desire can be a catalyst toward a flight away from this situation.

We are mired there, in the classroom, then, yet that is the very space which can provide an opening into new territory. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, in their "anti-facist" how-to manual *Anti-Oedipus*, are worth exploring in this context because so much of what they say are reverberations of Barthes's descriptions of repressive teacher-student relations and the classroom situation. In the preface, Michel Foucault describes the book as "a book of ethics," one that embodies a way of thinking and living "counter to all forms of fascism," including, of course, fascism in the classroom. Foucault points to traces of fascism in every fold of human existence -- in speech, acts, hearts, pleasures, flesh and soul. The roots of fascism lie, for Deleuze and Guattari, in philosophies and systems

of thought that set at the base of all systems of meaning: the subject, the agent, the one who wills. And all systems of thought in the western philosophical tradition have this human center. Hegel privileged the absolute spirit that came into self-awareness through human agency. Heidegger placed the human at the center of his thought as the being that sheltered Being in language. Psychoanalysis is just one more return of the same, a system that reads all meaning across the Oedipal tragedy, an imposition of interpretation that Deleuze and Guattari read as fascism.

Deleuze and Guattari reject the totalizing system of psycholanalysis, but further, they reject the traditional idea of agency and subjectivity that lies at the heart of it. They seek instead plurality, multiplicity, a collective sort of subjectivity (if one can still use the word at all). Such a non-agent, an anti-oedipus, would be free to follow the force of its desires, desires that are the machine that drives the universe. Desires are the effects of the opposition of the forces of attraction and repulsion, which produce primary emotional experiences as "intensities, becomings, transitions." These experiences show up as a series of positive, "metastable states through which a subject passes" (19). The subject is produced as a sort of residue alongside the machine, and is not at the center, but "on the periphery, with no fixed identity, forever decentered, *defined* by the states through which it passes" (20).

In the second volume of the *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* pair, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari map a structure that traces paths of these "becomings," of tactics for movement. The states that a subject passes through are called plateaus, and though one is caught up on one, there is usually available a "line of flight" out of it. Of course, the subject will only be thrown upon another, and can never escape structure,

structuration, there are always lines of light open for perpetual movement. I think this recognizes the fact that there is no such thing as truly escaping being read, interpreted, pegged, fixed within a system. We may be constantly territorialized and reterritorialized, as they put it, but at the very least one does not have to stay mired within the same system -- one must perpetually deterritorialize.

Brian Massumi, in his reading of Deleuze and Guattari, describes five strategies for flight, for remapping the territory. First, he says, we must "stop the world" (103), disconnect "automatic circuits" that we habitually establish between stimuli and responses. This involves becoming aware of our responses and how conditioned we are to them, which is necessary before any flight is possible. Second, he describes the need to "cherish derelict spaces" (104). These are, he says, "holes in habit," "cracks in the existing order," a "zone of indeterminacy that bodies-in-becoming may make their own." These "autonomous zones" are openings within the larger, dominant system where in people can attempt to make changes, achieve difference. Third, one must "study camouflage" in order for something new to succeed. One simulates the role assigned by the social system, wearing a mask, so to speak (I am reminded of Barthes's borrowing of "proceeding behind the mask," which he uses in several works), while in the process of developing the new. Fourth, one must "sidle and straddle," establishing a number of circuits or tactics one can follow at a given moment in order to survive in a hostile environment. "Becoming," Massumi says, "is always marginal, a simultaneous coming and going in a borderland zone between modes of action. The place of invention is a space of transformational encounter, a dynamic in-between. To get there, one must move sideways, through cracks . . . " as opposed to the only

occasionally effective straight-ahead charge." Finally, Massumi calls for a need to "come out," to throw off the camouflage "as soon as you can and still survive. What one comes out of is identity" (104).

This last step is problematic, I think. He claims that "the goal is a limit never approached, never reached," that "coming out is never complete" and that "what is important is the process: desire for the future" (104). But the idea that one can throw off the camouflage at all is to intimate that one has arrived, somehow, at some identity one is able and willing to live with, and that, it seems to me, contradicts the whole Deleuze and Guattari call for perpetual deterritorialization, continual becoming, being generated as a function of the systems they call machinic. The whole idea of being able to condense an anti-oedipal strategy into a list is really ludicrous, at bottom. If the tactic is to be always moving, then specific tactics can't be codified and passed on, even as some kind of pedagogical strategy; they must be devised on the fly. But I like the list, because it opens one up to the possibilities that are available to a person who recognizes that she is part of a system, a social machine, in this case an education machine, and always will be. Deterritorializing oneself is always simultaneously caught up in the process of being reterritorialized I think of those who devised strategies that worked for them -- Burke's pentad, and Young, Becker and Pike's tagmemics, even Ulmer's heuretics; inevitably someone came along and tried to teach them as heuristic strategies, and then the poor students would spend more time trying to learn the system than coming up with something to write about. Such lists and strategies can serve as sorts of lines of flight, I think, only for the people who invent them, and even then, only as long as they do [or did] not get tangled up in the lines themselves.

But for the rest of us, perhaps, they serve as traces of possibilities that have come before, as evidence that such things can be attempted.

So far I have examined some problems of subjectivity, systems, and pedagogy and outlined a general strategy for [everlastingly] evading them. The pedogogical problems involve a teacher being caught up in the will-to-love students, to lead them, to master them, being caught up in a quest for identity through this activity. Students, in turn, demand of teachers that they conform to economic expectations, even, and perhaps especially, of those teachers who are doing their best to thwart such goals. And still those who successfully devise tactics to escape this rut inevitably get "pedagougued" (or do it to themselves) through some textbook that codifies their ideas so they may be "taught." Now, having already made a general introduction to other possibilities through Deleuze and Guattari, I want to examine Barthes's tactics for surviving in the face of such problems. What is teaching? He asks this question, always accompanied by the words space, difference, body, fragment, desire.

Barthes recognizes the "territory" that he has to work with as "insitutional space," which establishes "a frequency, a schedule, a site, sometimes a *cursus*." ("Seminar" 332). There is also a "transferential" space, which is traditionally the relation between the director of the seminar and the student, but he refuses to be bound by this relation. It is here that he describes his vision of the role of "teacher":

> I do not say what I know, I set forth what I am doing; I am not draped in the interminable discourse of absolute knowledge, I am not lurking in the terrifying silence of the Examiner (every teacher-- and this is the vice of the system -- is a potential examiner); I am neither a sacred (consecrated) subject nor a

> buddy, only a manager, an operator, a regulator: the one who gives rules, protocols, not laws. My role (if I have one) is to clear the stage on which horizontal transferences will be established: what matters, in such a seminar (the site of its success), is not the relation of the members to the director but the relation of the members to teach other." (333)

The seminar, and also the composition classroom, is the space where this relation may find an opening in which to grow, to become. It is a space that allows the "textual" space to arise, the production of a text "that does not appear in writing." This text is one created in terms of "a certain way of being together," creating "texts which are not products but practices" (333). The text that is practiced, I think, may be called "difference," or making difference in terms of becoming. Barthes begins an interesting image to describe this process, calling the seminar a "phalanstery," as if the students are trying to create a eutopia, or perhaps an a-topia, where "the seminar's work is the production of difference," where relations are established, and that "each relation, gradually (it takes time) is made original: discovers the originality of bodies taken one by one, breaks off the reproduction of roles, the repetition of discourses, counters any staging of prestige, of rivalry" (334). This is, I think, very much an anti-fascist, anti-oedipal activity.

Barthes further develops his concept of "difference" in the classroom in examining what it means to teach. The great question is how "to teach what occurs only once" when teaching traditionally means to repeat. Deleuze and Guattari describe this in the formula (n-1), where the unique is always a function of difference, the once removed. Barthes has been doing this all his life. His history of Michelet was based on his own,

personal interests in the man and his work, motives that he did not disguise through the usual historiographic techniques. In examining popular culture, including fashion, he attended to what attracted his interests. Eventually, he even devised a system by which to organize it all, structuralism. And then he moved on and left it to the structuralist children he had seeded. Again and again Barthes takes an interest in an event, a phenomenon, a thought, develops it, plays with it lovingly, and then moves on, always (n-1), leaving the territory to be colonized by others, while he goes out to survey the uncharted. Using Deleuze and Guattari's terms, he perpetually deterritorializes, becomes reterritorialized, and then finds a path to follow out into another territory, where the whole process is perpetuated, but always in a new way.

I think it is this experience he is trying to achieve for his students. He is trying to create space in which, bound on all sides by institutional expectations, he can make some room for them to explore, to experiment, to see where their desire takes them. For to follow one's desire is to deterritorialize. And one can codify it to one's own purposes, of course -- to produce the thesis, the scholarly article that gains one prestige, the book, the teaching text. But one hopes that his students learn how to avoid becoming mired in that particular space. In establishing his seminars, Barthes seeks to "get round this paradigm. . . we must rephrase it; we no longer set the dry intelligence in opposition to the warm heart; but we employ the formidable machinery of science, of method, of criticism, in order to express *gently*, *occasionally*, and *somewhere* (these intermittences being the seminar's very justification) what we might call, in an antiquated style, the motions of desire" (341).

Difference is what sparks desire, a fragmentary flash of an object worth following, worth searching for, researching. Barthes defines "eroticism" as occurring "wherever desire has an object. "Here, the objects are many, flexible, or better still, passing, caught up in a movement of appearance/disappearance: they are fragments of knowledge, dramas of method, snatches of sentence" (335). This, he says, "disperses, circulates." The seminar itself is a space where a process of dissemination occurs, a seeding, so to speak, which, like a burst pod, radiates its production. The "space of the seminar has its rules (a game always does)," Barthes emphasizes, "but is not regulated." It has no foreman, only an "initating figure," whose role -- it is only a gesture -- is to put the ring into circulation. . . for henceforth it is no longer a chain we are concerned with but an order of ramifications, a tree [or perhaps better, a rhizome] of desires. . ." (338).

A writer is first sparked to a new idea worth investigating by coming across fragmentary pieces of ideas or thoughts that elicit a feeling, a physical response. They are the clues, the flashes that students should be opened to, shown how to become aware of, and how to follow, that they *may* follow. Felix Guattari, in *Chaosmosis*, says that when analyzing his patients, he goes where they go, rather than trying to fit them into the oedipal narrative. He gives the example of the patient who rather off-handedly remarks that he is "thinking of taking up driving lessons again" (17). Such a remark may be traditionally unnoticed, but Guattari maintains that an analyst should encourage the analysand to follow it, that such comments are "singularities," providing openings, to "new fields of virtuality." In such a case, he would explore this comment and even encourage the patient to act upon it. He says, "It's sometimes necessary to

jump at the opportunity, to approve, run the risk of being wrong, to give it a go, to say, 'yes, perhaps this experience is important'" (19).

What sparks these explorations is creating a site where students are free to follow these fragments that elicit their desire. But also important is the classroom as the place that offers the presence of others who want to connect with what we produce. Barthes says, "For desire to be insinuated into my work, that work must be demanded of me not by a collectivity seeking to guarantee my labor and to gain a return on the loans it grants me, but by a living collection of readers expressing the desire of the Other (and not the control of the Law)" ("Research" 70). The seminar that Barthes describes provides an opportunity to publish for others in a more meaningful way than just for the eyes of a teacher. "By publishing fragments of initial research, we hope to combat . . . repression and to release not only the author of the article but his reader. . . . Research must no longer be that parsimonious task performed either in the researcher's 'consciousness' . . or in the impoverished oscillation which makes the 'director' of a research project its only reader. Research must join the anonymous circulation of language, the dispersion of the Text" (71-72).

It is through this dispersal, this dissemination, that the seminar participates not in the hoarding of knowledge, but in its circulation, in which people may grasp an attractive bit and run with it, opening possibilities for the unique, the new. The new will be codified, digested, passed on, but the researching can continue unabated, provided there are spaces within which to create it and audiences who desire it. When these seeds radiate, like a milkweed pod, they settle into new territory. These are lines of flight onto different plateaus. Of course, the problems will persist -- economics will make its demands, the new will be insitutionalized and

transmogrify into the old, the repeated. But this merely provides more ground for seminars to explore; as Barthes says, quoting, "'Perhaps our work merely consists in identifying fragments of writing caught up in a discourse still guaranteed by the father.' No better definition of what, in previous work, is Literature, and what is Text" ("Research" 73).

Inasmuch as this is a "short" examination of the topic, applying these concepts to the freshman writing classroom is a bit beyond the scope intended. But certainly there are ramifications worth exploring. As instructors, or perhaps, instigators, facilitators, we are operating deep within an established system. But I can think of no more "derelict space" than the rhetoric classroom. Certainly there is room here for camouflage, for sidling and straddling. Occasionally, of course, we will have to slip from "mothering" to "apprenticeship," as our seminars are unceremoniously dumped back into our laps from various hands, but event this can be a risky and worthwhile process, compared to "teaching" ("Seminar" 339-40). Decomposing the composition classroom is a perpetual process.

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